

Right to food strategy could eliminate food waste on farms

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A national strategy to ensure that families have access to food could revolutionize Canada's farms, according to a new study from Simon Fraser University's Food Systems Lab. The study proposes implementing

a "right to food" framework that would support the needed funding, infrastructure, and stability that can reduce losses of edible food at the farm, while creating better access to local foods for consumers.

The study, published in the journal *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, looked at the reasons for on-farm losses of edible food. Approximately 14 percent of the world's food is lost before it ever reaches store shelves. In Canada, 35.5 million metric tons of food are lost or wasted annually, costing the economy \$49.5 billion.

With 32 percent of this waste considered avoidable, Food Systems Lab research director Tammara Soma and her team, Rajiv Kozhikode and Rekha Krishnan from Beedie School of Business, interviewed 40 farmers and stakeholders in the food and agricultural industry to find out why some of this wasted food never even leaves the farm.

While the reasons for farm-level food waste varied greatly—from farmers overproducing to hedge against risks, to canceled orders, weather disruptions and even produce being rejected because it is deemed "too ugly" to sell—the study identified policies governments could implement to provide stability for farmers.

The right to food approach would make [local foods](#) more accessible, stabilize prices, help farmers better plan, and connect farmers to alternative outlets and government-funded food procurement programs. This can ensure that perfectly good food goes to families instead of being left on the ground or composted.

"The right to food approach has the potential to ensure that access to food, especially for those who are marginalized, will not depend on the vagaries of donations and rejected produce," says Soma, an assistant professor at SFU's School of Resource and Environmental Management. "Re-orientating our values and regulatory structure to ensure that Canada

lives up to its commitment to recognize food as a right could also benefit farmers. It would also reduce waste by challenging unfair trading practices, providing living wages and improve supply management."

Canada is already a signatory to the international human rights agreement and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes the "right to food." However, Soma says Canada's implementation of the agreement is lacking. Non-market-based approaches, such as having farms provide directly to school food programs, could help Canada meet its commitment and help farmers reduce avoidable [food](#) waste.

More information: T. Soma et al. Tilling food under: Barriers and opportunities to address the loss of edible food at the farm-level in British Columbia, Canada, *Resources, Conservation and Recycling* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.resconrec.2021.105571](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2021.105571)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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